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Letter dated 7 June 2000 from the Permanent Representative of Portugal to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to draw your attention to the report from the European Disability Forum, entitled "Beijing+5: Priority concerns for Disabled Women 2000" (see annex).

On behalf of the Presidency of the European Union, I should be grateful if you would have the present letter and its annex circulated as a document of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly under agenda items 8 and 9.

(*Signed*) António **Monteiro**
Ambassador
Permanent Representative of Portugal to the United Nations

00-46834 (E) 070600

Annex to the letter dated 7 June 2000 from the Permanent Representative of Portugal to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

European Disability Forum

Beijing+5 : Priority concerns for **Disabled Women 2000**

EDF 00/11 – 16 May 2000

"States will participate actively in international cooperation concerning policies for the equalization of opportunities for persons with disabilities. *(1) Within the United Nations, the specialized agencies and other concerned intergovernmental organizations, States should participate in the development of disability policy.* ***(2)*** *Whenever appropriate, States should introduce disability aspects in general negotiations concerning standards, information exchange, development programmes, etc.* ***(3)*** *States should encourage and support the exchange of knowledge and experience among: (a) Non-governmental organizations concerned with disability issues; [...] (d) Organizations of persons with disabilities; [...]* ***(4)*** *States should ensure that the United Nations and the specialized agencies, as well as all intergovernmental and interparliamentary bodies, at global and regional levels, include in their work the global and regional organizations of persons with disabilities."* ***Rule 22 International co-operation United Nations Standard Rules on the Equalisation of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities , 1993***

European Disability Forum
Forum Européen des Personnes Handicapées
square Ambiorix, 32 Box 2/a — B-1000 Brussels
T +32-2-282.4600 **F** +32-2-282.4609
E info@edf-feph.org **W** www.edf-feph.org

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The European Disability Forum (EDF) is a European umbrella organisation with 70 European NGOs and 17 National Councils from all of the EU as members. EDF represents the interests of 37 million disabled citizens in the EU. Our mission is to advance disabled people's human rights and to promote equal opportunities in the EU Institutions and Member States in accordance with principles of non-discrimination. The European Disability Forum is a member of the "Platform of European Social NGOs" and the "European Women's Lobby".

Doc EDF 00/11 "Beijing+5 review: Women 2000 - Priority concerns for disabled women *EDF 00/11 – 16 May 2000* © Copyright European Disability Forum 2000. This document may be quoted and reproduced, provided the source is given.

This paper is based on the "Manifesto by Disabled Women in Europe", adopted by the European Disability Forum in 1997.
The Manifesto is available in English, French, Spanish, German, Danish, Dutch, Finnish, Greek, Italian, Portuguese and Swedish, on the EDF Website at: **www.edf-feph.org** Copies are also available on request from the EDF secretariat in Russian and Estonian. It is also available on diskette or in large-print upon demand from the EDF Secretariat.

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Introduction

Disabled women and girl form at least 10 percent of the total population of women. They - mothers, daughters, sisters and wives- are more often than men the carers of disabled children and adults in the family. Women concerned with disability make up a significant minority of women world-wide and demand that proper account is taken of their specific situations in the Beijing+5 review.

The European Disability Forum would like to see the Beijing+5 document include references to disabled women and girls in the following way:

1. A **general reference in the beginning of the document to the mainstreaming of the diversity of women and double discrimination** throughout the document. This would include disability and other grounds such as race and ethnic origin, age, religion or belief, sexual orientation. This list is not exhaustive.

2. Each of the chapters, should make **specific remarks** according to the key points outlined below under each theme. Specific actions to **combat double discrimination** should be suggested and implemented.

3. Women and disability to be made an **emerging issue**, to which further attention will be given.

A definition: What do we mean by women with disabilities/disabled women?

Girls and women with disabilities include women with all kinds of disabilities, women with physical, hearing, visual and mental impairments, visible or otherwise, including women with mental illness and mental health problems, learning disabilities, and various chronic conditions such as diabetes, heart or kidney disease, epilepsy, HIV/AIDS, diseases predominantly affecting women such as breast cancer, arthritis, Lupus, fibromyalgia and osteoporosis. It includes disabled girls and women of all ages, in rural and urban areas, regardless of the severity of the disability, regardless of sexual preference and regardless of cultural background, or whether they live in the community or in an institution.

1 Women and poverty

The effectiveness of poverty eradication programs should be improved to reach and have a positive impact on the poorest and the most disadvantaged groups of

women and girls, including women and girls with disabilities. They need access to employment, education, rehabilitation, credit, skills and social services.

2 Women and education

Disabled women need specific measures to overcome barriers of access to the education systems. They may need special education systems, methods or physical spaces. This ranges from adequate facilities to special educational systems. Policies should be designed that target the needs of women and girls with disabilities and their access to education at all levels as well as ensure them adequate rehabilitation and vocational training in order for them to obtain suitable employment. Policy programmes should be developed that support women with disabilities and their access to and use of new information technologies. Special programmes should be established in order to reduce the illiteracy rate of women with disabilities to at least half of its 2000 level by 2010.

3 Women and health

Effective medical care, rehabilitation, technical aids and supportive services should be ensured to girls and women with disabilities. Primary health care should cover the needs of disabled women at home or by providing access to health clinics and hospitals. The practitioners should be trained to recognise the onset of disabilities arising from mental health problems and to take the appropriate action. In all healthcare situations, especially in gyneacology, it is important to respect the integrity of women with disabilities, with special consideration for the requirement of respect for visually impaired women and women using interpreters. Disabled women and girls should be made aware of the risk of HIV and AIDS. Contraceptive education and sexual education is essential in this respect. Education and training of personnel should be ensured for personnel that come in contact with women and girls with disabilities who stay in hospitals or other institutions.

Rehabilitation must include training in female body language and self confidence. Special models for rehabilitation should be developed for different groups of disabled women in close co-operation with their organisations. Deaf women and girls have the right to early diagnosis and to benefit from speech therapy, using flexible methods that shall include both sign and spoken language.

4 Violence against women

Women and girls with disabilities are more likely to be victims of violence because of their vulnerability. The right of disabled girls and women to live in freedom and safety should be fully recognised. Control of their own body should

be guaranteed for disabled women, to protect them against physical, psychological and sexual violence. This is very important particularly for disabled women who have to stay in hospitals, rehabilitation and other institutions, and those who are unable to represent themselves. Plans and policies should be adopted to protect women and girls with disabilities from all forms of discrimination and physical, psychological and sexual violence.

All countries reporting to CEDAW should include in their reports information regarding the situation of women and girls with disabilities, in accordance with the General Recommendation n° 18 of CEDAW. The countries should organise seminars when compiling information for their periodic reports, and consult with NGOs dealing with disabled women's rights.

The EU should develop common guidelines for the structuring of reports to the UN Special Rapporteur on the Violence against Women, so that a model can be provided to facilitate evaluation of Member States progress. This exercise will enhance reporting mechanisms within the EU and in particular the commitment made to review Member States developments annually at the European Social Affairs Council meetings. Special investigations should be made regarding violence against women and girls with disabilities, and their situation should be integrated into all investigations carried out by the Rapporteur.

The theme of violence against women should be part of the European Commission's research and development programmes and stipulated as such. Special attention should be paid to carry out research regarding violence against women and girls with disabilities, especially those living in institutions. Statistical data should be collected on female victims in all their diversity as well as on the characteristics of their offenders.

In order to be able to provide social and psychological support, sheltered housing such as women refuge centres and all other mainstream organisations and facilities (brochures, telephone numbers, therapists, etc.) in the field of violence and sexual abuse against women should be made accessible to women with all kinds of disabilities.

5 Women in armed conflicts

The human rights should be guaranteed to women and girls who are or have become disabled due to armed conflicts. Particular attention should be paid to areas affecting their basic needs, such as accessible housing and shelter, economic wellbeing, rehabilitation, health care and technical aids, education and information.

The position of disabled female refugees should be investigated. Facilities should be made available in refugee camps and education should be one of the first priorities.

6 Women and the economy

Employment is a critical component in enabling disabled women to support themselves financially and to achieve self-esteem and social recognition. Disabled women should be trained for employment opportunities in the labour market. When special training is needed, disabled women should not be disadvantaged in comparison with other women. Disabled women should have appropriate access to all training programmes and should be actively encouraged to participate. Existing vocational training programmes for women should be made especially accessible to disabled women and support services should be provided.

Laws and regulations in the employment field should not discriminate against disabled women and should not create obstacles to their employment. Disabled women should be encouraged to seek employment opportunities which have a reasonable wage and status. Effective assistance should be given to disabled women to maintain employment, through such means as follow-up services and contacts with employers and legal protection against unfounded job loss on account of their disability.

A set of policies and programmes should be developed by the states to ensure the contribution of women with disabilities in the labour market through adequate rehabilitation schemes, education and training and through accessibility of the environment and information.

The principles of free movement as stated in the EU treaties, should be secured also to women with disabilities. Disabled migrant girls and women should be given adequate support and scope to develop their skills and potential in vocational training, and be given opportunities to obtain suitable employment.

7 Women in power and decision making

Leadership development should assist disabled girls and women to attain self-esteem and to encourage them to take leadership positions, in order to become integrated members of their communities, and to encourage their increased participation in power sharing at all levels of society in all countries. All groups of women should be ensured access to targeted training, mentoring programmes and accessible information about politics. All necessary measures should be taken to involve women, their groups and organisations, including socially active women with disabilities, in policy and decision making processes in economic

and social areas e.g. through consultations and enlarged participation of women in unions and other associations.

8 Institutional mechanisms to promote the advancement of women

The situation of women and girls with disabilities should be monitored through the human Rights instrument of the United Nations Standard Rules of the Equalisation of opportunities of Persons with Disabilities.

Women with disabilities and their organisations should be regularly consulted in order to effectively mainstream the issues and concerns of women and girls with disabilities into the development of the society. The empowerment process of women with disabilities and their organisations should be promoted through providing sufficient resources for their work at local, national and international levels.

The establishment and work of organisations, networks and committees of women with disabilities should be encouraged, as should their inclusion in the mainstream process of women's empowerment. Access to technology should be provided that enabled women's organisations to build and maintain networks, and to generate and share information. Special attention should be given to women who are deaf, blind, deafblind or intellectually disabled. Resources should be allocated to support national and regional cross-cutting inter-agency programmes in areas such as life conditions of women and girls with disabilities.

9 Women and human rights

All forms of violence against women must be discussed and addressed in the context of women's human rights. The EU should adopt policies relating to women's specific needs particularly in relation to asylum and refugee status. This includes an EU agreement on the recognition of gender based persecution as a legitimate reason for seeking and granting of asylum. The report demanded by the European Parliament to annually review the issue of violence and discrimination towards disabled people should make specific reference to the situation of disabled girls and women, and should make suggestions for improved legal protection of disabled women against violence.

Disabled girls and women should have access to general and specific training programmes in accordance with their needs and, where integration may be hindered, support services should be provided with the purpose of facilitating integration into the general population. Disabled women, their families and all working with disabled women should be fully informed on taking precautions

against sexual abuse. In the case of abuse of disabled women, especially of women with learning disabilities, legislation should be developed and enforced and the personnel involved (magistrates, solicitors, prosecutors, etc.) should be trained.

Women with mental health problems, have the right to "women-only" wards and services which offer a choice to women, in particular of a similar cultural or ethnic background.

Harmful attitudes and practices affecting girls and women, such as female genital mutilation, should be eliminated, through educational programmes for women and men and legislative measures in criminal law. Migrant and third country national disabled girls and women should have the same rights and access to all mainstream facilities as other disabled girls and women in their country.

10 Women and the media

Education for people responsible for portraying disabled women and girls or disabled women's and girl's issues, such as journalists, media, filmmakers etc, is essential in order to obtain positive images instead of the charity or medical concept of pity. Promotion of positive non-stereotyped images of women and girls with disabilities, in co-operation with organisations of persons with disabilities, should be encouraged

11 Women and environment

Special health monitoring programs need to be established for women with chronic diseases related to environmental hazards. Further awareness-raising and research and need to take place regarding the environment and disability. Legislation should be enacted to bring about environmental adjustments and changes in order to provide disabled women and girls with access to all buildings including, but not limited to, hospitals, educational centres and public facilities. No transport policies should discriminate against disabled girls and women.

12 The girl child

Girl children with disabilities face additional barriers and need to be ensured non-discrimination and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms in accordance with the UN Standard Rules on the Equalisation of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities. All barriers must be eliminated to enable girls with disabilities to develop their full potential and skills through equal access to education and training, nutrition, physical and mental health care and related information.